

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PEPR, SY, US, XF

SUBJECT: CALL BY SYRIAN AMBASSADOR ON ASSISTANT SECRETARY
ATHERTON

1. SYRIAN AMBASSADOR KABBANI ON FEBRUARY 13 MET WITH
ATHERTON, PRIMARILY TO DISCUSS ATHERTON'S FORTHCOMING
MISSION. KABBANI DREW ATTENTION TO THE DANGER OF OVER-
CONCENTRATING EFFORTS ON THE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI ASPECTS OF A
SETTLEMENT, SAYING THIS COULD REINFORCE BELIEFS IN SYRIA
AND ELSEWHERE THAT PRESENT EFFORTS ARE DIRECTED TOWARD A
BILATERAL AGREEMENT, RATHER THAN A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT.
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 STATE 039510

ATHERTON STRESSED THAT THE U.S. CONTINUES TO SEEK A COMPRE-
HENSIVE PEACE BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT THE STABILITY AND
PROSPERITY OF THE REGION CANNOT BE ASSURED ON THE BASIS OF
PARTIAL SOLUTIONS. ON THE BASIS OF OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH
SADAT, WE ARE SURE THAT EGYPT REMAINS DETERMINED TO ACHIEVE
A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT.

2. NOTING THAT SYRIA WILL BE WATCHING DEEDS RATHER THAN
WORDS, KABBANI SAID IT WAS VERY IMPORTANT FOR THE U.S. AND
SYRIA TO KEEP IN CLOSE CONTACT DURING THE CURRENT PHASE,

IF EFFORTS IN PROGRESS WERE TO EVER OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ESTABLISHING FULL PEACE. ATHERTON AGREED, ADDING WE TRIED TO DO SO. FOR EXAMPLE, MURPHY IS NOW AWAITING AN

APPOINTMENT WITH KHADDAM TO BRIEF HIM ON THE DISCUSSIONS IN WASHINGTON WITH SADAT.

3. KABBANI QUESTIONED THE VALUE OF A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. HE WONDERED WHAT THE NEW PRINCIPLES WOULD ACCOMPLISH THAT PREVIOUS FORMULATIONS SUCH AS 242 AND 338, THE U.S.-SOVIET STATEMENT, WITH ALL THEIR AMBIGUITIES, DID NOT? ATHERTON REPLIED THAT NO ONE SHOULD BELIEVE THAT AGREEMENT ON THE PRINCIPLES WE ARE SEEKING WOULD CONSTITUTE A SOLUTION. IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE, HOWEVER, TO FORMULATE PRINCIPLES WHICH WILL MAKE IT CLEAR THAT THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROCESS IS TO ACHIEVE A SOLUTION OF ALL ISSUES AND WITH ALL PARTIES. IN ADDITION, HE THOUGHT PRINCIPLES SOMEWHAT MORE SPECIFIC THAN PREVIOUS STATEMENTS COULD BE HAMMERED OUT, THEREBY REDUCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIFFERING LATER INTERPRETATIONS. IN THE END, A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT WOULD HAVE TO TAKE THE FORM OF A SERIES OF BILATERAL AGREEMENTS DEALING WITH SPECIFICS, WHICH MIGHT BE NEGOTIATED ON THE GENERAL BASIS OF PRINCIPLES
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 039510

PREVIOUSLY AGREED UPON.

4. KABBANI EXPRESSED RESERVATIONS THAT PRINCIPLES APPLICABLE TO ALL FRONTS COULD BE WORKED OUT GIVEN AN ISRAELI TENDENCY TO QUIBBLE OVER WORDS AND PHRASES, SUCH AS THE PHRASE "IN ALL ITS ASPECTS" IN THE ASWAN STATEMENT. ATHERTON EXPLAINED THAT WORDS BECOME CONTENTIOUS PRECISELY BECAUSE THEY REFERRED TO SPECIFIC OUTCOMES FOR CONTENTIOUS QUESTIONS. THE ISRAELIS, HE STATED, TOOK ISSUE WITH SUCH A PHRASE BECAUSE THEY FEARED IT IMPLIED ALL-EMBRACING SOLUTIONS TO THE QUESTION OF SOVEREIGNTY ON THE WEST BANK AND TO THE FUTURE OF THE DIASPORA PALESTINIANS. ATHERTON SAID HE WOULD NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF STATING PRINCIPLES BECAUSE THEY SIGNAL ACCEPTANCE OF THE RESULTS THAT WOULD FLOW LOGICALLY FROM THEM.

5. ATHERTON ADDED THAT SADAT HAD TAKEN THE INITIATIVE TO SEEK A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES WHICH MIGHT BRING OTHERS INTO THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND TO MAKE CLEAR THAT HE IS NOT RPT NOT DOING WHAT HE IS BEING ACCUSED OF BY SYRIA AND OTHERS--SEEKING A SEPARATE PEACE.

6. KABBANI NOTED THAT THE ISRAELIS WERE PLAYING DOWN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SADAT'S INITIATIVE, REFERRING TO IT AS A "SO-CALLED" INITIATIVE. ATHERTON REPLIED THAT THE U.S. ATTRIBUTED GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF SADAT'S ACTION; HE SUGGESTED THAT THE WORLD HAD NOT

YET HEARD THE LAST WORD FROM ISRAEL AND THAT THE OUTCOME MAY SHOW ISRAELI RECOGNITION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GESTURE. GENERALLY, ATHERTON SAID, PROGRESS ON ISRAEL'S

PART CANNOT BE ACHIEVED IN THE ABSTRACT. FOR TEH YEARS, HE SAID, THE ISRAELIS HAVE BEEN SAYING THAT RESOLUTION 242 DOES NOT REQUIRE THEM TO WITHDRAW TO THE 1967 BOUNDARIES AND THAT THEY WOULD NOT, IN ANY EVENT, WITHDRAW TO THOSE LINES. IN THE SPECIFIC CASE OF SINAI, THE ISRAELIS WERE CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 STATE 039510

FACED WITH THE NECESSITY FOR A CONCRETE DECISION AND HAD, IN FACT, AGREED TO WITHDRAW TO THE 1967 FRONTIERS. IT IS TRUE, HE CONTINUED, THAT THEY DID SO WITH CONDITIONS THAT SADAT FEELS ARE UNACCEPTABLE, BUT THESE ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM CAN BE NEGOTIATED. AS FAR AS THE SETTLEMENTS IN SINAI ARE CONCERNED, HE CONCLUDED, THE U.S. POSITION IS CLEAR.

7. KABBANI SAID THE ISRAELIS HAVE ALWAYS RELATED THEIR RELUCTANCE TO WITHDRAW UNDER 242 TO QUESTIONS OF SECURITY. NOW THAT THE ARABS (INCLUDING BY IMPLICATION SYRIA) ARE READY TO GIVE THEM ALL KINDS OF GUARANTEES AND ASSURANCES ON THIS SCORE, INCLUDING DMZS, EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS, ETC., WON'T THIS ISRAELI JUSTIFICATION BE WEAKENED? ATHERTON SAID THESE WERE IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS, BUT REMINDED KABBANI THAT SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS HAD TO BE NEGOTIATED.

8. WHEN KABBANI ASKED FOR MORE BACKGROUND ON THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, ATHERTON EXPLAINED THAT BOTH THE EGYPTIANS AND ISRAELIS HAD PRODUCED DRAFTS AT ISMAILIYAH. WHEN THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE CONVENED IN JERUSALEM WITH THE SECRETARY AS AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT, THE TWO DRAFTS WERE ON THE TABLE AND IT SOON BECAME CLEAR THAT MUCH TIME COULD BE LOST IN WRANGLING ON THEIR COMPARATIVE MERITS. WE THEREFORE PUT FORWARD A WORKING DRAFT CONTAINING REWORKED POINTS OF COMMON AGREEMENT PLUS "BRIDGING FORMULATIONS" FOR ISSUES ON WHICH THERE WAS SUBSTANTIAL DISAGREEMENT.

9. THE GREATEST REMAINING DIFFICULTY IS OVER THE PALESTINIAN ASPECT AND THAT IS WHERE HE (ATHERTON) WILL CONCENTRATE WHEN HE RETURNS TO THE AREA. THE U.S., HE NOTED, HAS PUT FORWARD THE ASWAN FORMULA AS A MEANS AROUND THE CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 STATE 039510

DISAGREEMENT BUT NEITHER EGYPT NOR ISRAEL HAS FORMALLY ACCEPTED IT.

10. KABBANI INQUIRED WHETHER ATHERTON SENSED THAT THE

DECLARATION WOULD PROVIDE SYRIA WITH A REASON TO COME BACK INTO THE PEACE PROCESS. ATHERTON REPLIED THAT HE FELT THIS WAS POSSIBLE IF THE PRINCIPLES PROVIDED SYRIA AND JORDAN WITH SOME CONFIDENCE IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF POSITIVE RESULTS AT THE END OF THE PROCESS. HE NOTED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT RESOLUTION 242, IN ADDITION TO ITS AMBIGUITY, DOES NOT ADDRESS THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM; THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES WOULD DO SO.

11. KABBANI ASKED WHETHER A PRACTICAL MEANS OF PERMITTING PALESTINIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCESS COULD BE FOUND OR THAT THE PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVES COULD BE IDENTIFIED. ATHERTON SAID THE ANSWER TO THE FIRST QUESTION WAS EASIER: THE PALESTINIANS SHOULD BECOME A PARTY TO THE NEGOTIATIONS. AS FOR THE SECOND, ATHERTON DOUBTED THAT ANYONE CAN NOW ANSWER IN VIEW OF THE DIFFERING VIEWS ON THE QUESTION, EVEN AMONG THE PALESTINIANS THEMSELVES.

12. KABBANI FELT THERE SHOULD BE SOME WAY, PERHAPS UNDER UN AUSPICES, OF DETERMINING WHO THE PALESTINIANS WANT TO REPRESENT THEM. ATHERTON SAID HIS IMPRESSION IS THAT THE PALESTINIANS ARE AWAITING THE RESULTS OF CURRENT PEACE EFFORTS BEFORE DETERMINING THEIR ATTITUDE AND THIS BRINGS US BACK AGAIN TO THE NEED FOR A CLEARER DEFINITION OF THE BASIS FOR NEGOTIATIONS GOING BEYOND THE LANGUAGE OF 242. ATHERTON CAUTIONED THAT THIS OBJECTIVE, DIFFICULT AS IT IS, SHOULD NOT BE POSTPONED. WE ARE TALKING, HE CONCLUDED, ABOUT ACHIEVING RESULTS IN A MATTER OF WEEKS, NOT MONTHS.

13. KABBANI ASKED WHETHER THE US INTENDED TO INVOLVE THE UN IN THE PALESTINIAN ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM? ATHERTON RESPONDED THAT THIS WAS A STEP BEYOND PRESENT US THINKING, ALTHOUGH WE REALIZE THERE IS A ROLE FOR THE UN IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 06 STATE 039510

GENERAL PROCESS. HE REVIEWED UN PARTICIPATION IN CAIRO, ITS OBSERVER STATUS AT JERUSALEM, AND OUR OWN EFFORTS TO KEEP THE SYG INFORMED. A FRESH LOOK AT GREATER UN INVOLVEMENT MIGHT BE MERITED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE PRESENT PHASE OF NEGOTIATIONS.

14. ASSUMING THAT AGREEMENT ON GENERAL PRINCIPLES IS ACHIEVED, KABBANI WONDERED IF THE SUCCEEDING STEP WOULD BE THE IMMEDIATE CONCLUSION OF A BILATERAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN EGYPT AND ISRAEL. ATHERTON SAID THAT THE NEXT LOGICAL STEP WOULD BE TO DETERMINE WHETHER OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES SUCH AS SYRIA, WOULD AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS AND THEN, ULTIMATELY, TO TAKE THE NEGOTIATIONS BACK TO THE GENEVA CONTEXT. KABBANI OBSERVED THAT THE SYRIAN REACTION WOULD DEPEND ON THE CONTENT OF THE PRINCIPLES. ATHERTON CAUTIONED THAT THE PRINCIPLES SHOULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS SINCE FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BE ESSENTIAL. SYRIA, KABBANI SAID, WOULD

BE LOOKING ONLY TO THE QUESTIONS OF WITHDRAWAL AND SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE PALESTINIANS; WITH THESE PRINCIPLES ESTABLISHED, EVERYTHING ELSE WOULD BE RESOLVED IN NEGOTIATIONS. ATHERTON REMINDED HIM THAT ISRAEL WILL ALSO BE ASKING QUESTIONS AND SEEKING ASSURANCES BEFORE CONCEDED THE POINTS SYRIA IS INTERESTED IN.

15. ATHERTON SUMMED UP BY SAYING IT WAS TOO SOON TO PREDICT EITHER SUCCESS OR FAILURE BUT THAT HE EMPHATICALLY DISAGREED WITH THOSE WHO SAY THE EFFORT HAS ALREADY FAILED. HE ADDED THAT IT IS OUR FIRM UNDERSTANDING THAT SYRIA HAS NOT RPT NOT CLOSED ANY DOORS TO A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT. KABBANI AGREED STRONGLY.

16. KABBANI REFERRED TO THE PRESIDENT'S EXTRAORDINARY
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 07 STATE 039510

EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF RATIFICATION OF THE PANAMA CANAL TREATY AND SUGGESTED THAT THE PRESIDENT MIGHT MAKE SIMILAR EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS. ATHERTON SAID HE WOULDN'T SAY THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE AND THAT, INDEED, IT MIGHT BECOME NECESSARY AT SOME POINT BUT THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL HAVE TO MAKE SUCH A DECISION WITH FULL CONSIDERATION OF THE MANY FACTORS INVOLVED. VANCE

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